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Chapter VI. Customs and Practices

1. Birth

852 Twelve days after the birth of a Miao child, his family always holds a "twelfth-day" celebration for him; after a month there is a "first-month" celebration. The family kills chickens and cook meat. They ask a Taoist priest to come to pray for him and name him. 651 The child is usually named "Ya Ta" /Ya the Elder/ or "Ya Erh" /Ya the Second/, etc. There is also a celebration of his first birthday, but the way it is celebrated is unknown to me.

2. Marriage

582 The Miao are generally betrothed when they are about twenty years old. 584 Betrothals are either made through the decision of the parents and the advice of go-betweens, or they are made after a couple have fallen in love and ask the parents for permission and the consultation of a go-between. In the latter case, the parents always respect their children's wishes. According to Miao custom, however, before the formal betrothal, the hour, day, month, and year of birth of the young couple (these are entered in the family registers) must be "compared" by someone who is able to read the almanac well [622 787] (generally a chia-ch'ang). If their horoscopes are in harmony with each other and are not contradictory to those of the parents of both families, they are formally betrothed; otherwise, they must give each other up. Therefore, even if a couple are deeply in love and the match is approved of by the parents, if, unfortunately, their horoscopes are not "harmonious," they cannot marry. Many tragedies of lovers have resulted therefrom. 583 [831] Betrothal presents consist of about 20 dollars (previously 10 dollars or less), three jars of wine, three pecks of rice, and 30 catties of pork. There are two types of marriage: one is the ch'ü-hsi, in which the betrothal presents are given by the bridegroom's /47/ family; the other is the chao-chui 583 591 608 /literally, "to call a son-in-law," a marriage in which the son-in-law comes to live in the wife's family/ in which the betrothal presents are given by the bride's family.

4:Michey E-5 (1940-?) 1947 AE5 Miao AE5

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Childbirth. After a girl was married she returned to her parents' home. There she stayed, except for short periods in her husband's home during the busy seasons and at feasts, until she was pregnant. Before the child was born she went to live in his home permanently. Sometimes, but not always, when a woman was in labor a priest was asked to chant and cast lots in her behalf. This he did in a room adjacent to the one in which the mother was confined, or out-of-doors nearby. There were no midwives. The mother was assisted by other women who had borne children, either from her husband's or a related household.

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The next morning after a child was born the mother might appear with the baby on her back, even in the kitchen where food was being prepared. There was no idea of impurity and she was not required to keep closely at home for a month or forty days, as in the case of Chinese in the vicinity and among some other groups of Miao. She might rest for three or four days, during which other women came to see the baby, but after that she worked as before at even the hardest of labor, with the baby on her back. I am not sure whether she was expected to refrain from certain foods, or not. I offered one mother an orange which she said she could not eat. She gave it to an older son.

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Announcement Gifts. After the second grandson was born in the family where I was living, the father prepared gifts to send to the village from which his father had migrated, to the household in which an uncle still lived. First in the procession came two men playing the small trumpet. One of them led a black goat. This was a play on words, as the name of a goat (*yang*) has the same sound as the family name (*Yang*) and a word meaning "increase, growth." Then came two men bearing two poles, to which was fastened a whole dead pig, beautifully cleaned and white. After them came two men bearing a similar frame but empty. Last came a man bearing two baskets on a carrying pole. One of the baskets contained red candles and the other a

[1] See Chapple and Coon, 1942, p. 706.

4:Mickey E-5 (1940-?) 1947 AE5 Miao AE5

piece of gray cloth with the Chinese character meaning "to inform" on it. The father accompanied this procession. When they got to their destination a feast was held, at which the pig was made into the chief dishes. 852

Naming of Children. Miss Li said that boys were named after animals and girls "Mei" (daughter, or younger sister) with a number or other designation to indicate their position in the family. I did hear one boy given the Miao word for Rooster as a name; but most of the boys had Chinese names of good meaning. In one family all the five boys except the youngest had names in which one of the two characters was the same for all. When the oldest boy went to middle school in Lung-li he took a "school name." The names I heard for girls were "Mei" with some word of pleasant meaning, such as "Happiness," "Treasure," "Purity." 853

In the case of boys a "generation name," chosen before the child was born, was also given. He was not called by this name, however, until he had his own wife and family. It was kept in the family records and in those of the *lien pao*. In the village of Yang-chia-sai the oldest generation had the generation name "Heng," with an individual one, the next generation "Cheng," and the third "Tan." But several men of the second oldest generation were still called by their "baby names," and none of the third generation by anything but the familiar names or nicknames. Girls kept their childhood name until they entered their husband's homes permanently, after which they were known as XXX (husband's surname) XX (maiden name) Family; that is, XXX of the XX Family. After her husband died she was known as Widow XX (maiden name) and, if, as almost always happened, in the same village there were several widows with the same maiden name, she was known as Widow XX whose eldest son was named Y. For instance, if a man in Yang-chia-sai, whose surname, of course, was Yang, married a woman from the Wu family, she would be known after she entered his family 551 562

4:Mickey E-5 (1940-?) 1947 AE5 Miao AE5

The bridal party spent that afternoon getting to the groom's village. At the village they played and sang all night. The next day the bride's party was feasted by his relatives. On one occasion I saw, feasting took place about noon. The bride's party sat on two rows of benches facing one another on one of the threshing floors. The food was set in bowls on planks between them by women of a related household. 585

On the third day, after another night of singing and playing the *lu sheng*, the bride and her attendants returned to her village, accompanied by the groom, who brought gifts of meat and rice and spent the night there. When the bride and her attendants left the groom's village to return, the women of the village accompanied them, some stopping at the entrance to the village and some going a little way. At a point where the bride and her attendants were about to disappear from view they stopped and sang a song antiphonally with the other groups. Then they went on and the nearer group rushed after them to watch them out of sight. When they left they were still in ceremonial array, except for plainer blouses. They reached home dead tired and slept from the time of their arrival until the next day.

Tso Chia. After a girl was married she returned at once to her parents' home, where she stayed, except for short periods in her husband's home, during the busy seasons and at feasts, until she was pregnant. Before the child was born she went to live in his home permanently. When the first child was twenty-two days old girls from the mother's village were invited to "drink wine" in honor of the event. They called this "*tso k'ai.*"[2] Some said it was the same as "*tso chia.*"[3] Others said that it was the same as "*ch'ih chiu*" or "*tso chieh*"[4] — a time of rejoicing, calling, of course, for wine in abundance. Among the local Chungchia this was a combination of "*man yüeh*"[5] and the setting up of the permanent household in the groom's home. The bride's village sent with the guests at this feast among the Chungchia a red cupboard and clothing. 591 852 593

[4] This means to drink wine, or to attend a feast.
[5] The first month feast — The feast also given by the Chinese when a baby is a month old.

the womb again. After this any child born is 751
sure to grow into manhood. The decapitation and 847
butchering have to be done before the child
breathes his last. When the parents perceive
that the illness of the child is identical to
that of the other deceased children, /92/ they
expect him to die, and taking advantage of his
still being alive they cut off his head and
legs. Otherwise, they believe, the prevention
would not be effective. It is said that some
ignorant Chinese in the same locality also fol-
low this custom.

(10) Hair Preservation. When a child of 787
the Miao-I is born the parents invariably ask a 852
fortune-teller to outline his life's destiny. If 856
his destiny is not good, then his hair is allowed
to grow until he is six or twelve years old when
he has his first haircut. The long unshaved
hair is said to help preserve the life of the
child. The first haircut is an occasion for
great celebration: every household in the vil-
lage would hang out red and green festoons and
send greetings to the parents, who in turn would
give a party, killing chicken and pig for a
great feast.

(11) The Small Horse Image. If a child 755
among the Ch'ing Miao cries all night without 753
stop, the parents would attribute the cause of
the trouble to the passing by of the "sky horse",
a colloquial name for the locust. They would
hang on the door a straw-wrapped bowl filled
with rice and water, and little images of horses
cut from the bark of a tree. This would stop
the cry of the child.

(12) Throwing Water and Rice. When a Miao-
I first becomes ill, the general assumption is
that he has run into some starving ghost. The
family immediately burns a bunch of unhusked
rice and lights incense and candles in a bowl of
rice immersed in water. This bowl is carried

8: Graham E-5 (1921-1936) 1937 AE5 Miao AE5

At the end of a month the shells of all the eggs she has eaten, most of which have been given her by her friends, are taken out and thrown away on a nearby road or path which indicates to her friends that the month of confinement is over and that she is now pure. None of the eggs given her during her confinement can be given away. They must all be eaten by the mother.[12]

Among some of the Ch'uan Miao it is customary for a woman to give birth to her child while squatting beside her bed, holding onto the sides of the bed with her two hands. Another woman stands behind her and helps hold her up, holding her about the waist. The placents of a boy is sometimes buried deep under a piliar of the house and that of a girl under a door of the house.

Fearing that demons may harm the child, some do not cut the baby's hair for three years. Then the mother's oldest brother is invited to come and cut the child's hair. This brother sometimes gives the child clothing, a hat, a brass or silver bracelet, and a chain with a lock to hang around the child's neck. This is done in the morning after the *tuan kung* has repeated his incantations and performed his ceremonies during the whole of the previous night. Some at this time make a hole through one ear of the child and hang an ear-ring of silver or brass in it. The hole in the ear is an additional protection against demons.

When a boy is twelve, there is sometimes performed a ceremony of passing over the barrier which is called in Chinese *kuo kuan* 過關 and seems to be a sort of initiation ceremony. Twelve bowls are placed in a straight row on the floor of the house. They are covered by a piece of cloth about twelve feet long. Twelve sharp knives are placed on the floor in a direct line with the bowls and about one foot apart. The *tuan kung* first walks along, stepping on each bowl and then on each knife. The twelve-year-old boy then follows him, also stepping on each bowl and each knife. Generally neither the feet of the *tuan kung* nor those of the boy are injured, but if the feet of the boy are cut by the knives the *tuan kung* gets no money. This ceremony protects the child and afterwards he is regarded and esteemed as an adult.

If others desire special protection for a boy that is less than twelve years old, that boy can follow across under the protection of the *tuan kung*. The child will then be protected from demons and the ceremony will not be repeated at the age of twelve, but he will not be regarded as an adult until the age of twelve.

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12. I have not been able to secure any evidence that the couvade was formerly practiced by the Ch'uan Miao.

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585 a horse saddle to gain entrance through the gate. After the send-off party leaves, the bride's family immediately slaughters a pig or two, to carry to the groom's house as a send-off gift. That day friends and relatives float in like clouds to offer congratulations. The groom's family puts rice straw on the floor of the cow stall and spreads feasts to entertain the guests. Day or night they would not stop feasting until drunk. That night no one sleeps. The bride does not share the groom's room. The guests from the bride's family and the friends of the groom's family join in a song fest. The following day or the third day the bride returns home with her companions, and the host dispenses cash presents to all the members of the bridal party. The other guests stay on to partake of the farewell feast. After her
591 return the bride stays with her parents for a month or fortnight, and has to be welcomed back to her new home by her husband. But the girl's family would keep the son-in-law as a house guest for several days before sending the young couple away. After a short stay the bride goes back again to live with her mother, and only on New Year, at festivals and harvest times, would she accompany her husband home to stay for a few days as a guest of his family. It is only after the children are born that she lives permanently with him. One month after the birth of the first
852 child there would be a feast, and the wife's family [11] would
431 send along some baby clothes and, in case of a wealthy family, also cows and pigs. Those who have received cash gifts from the husband's family at the wedding would now give in return baby's bedding and clothing as well as chicken and duck eggs.
[804] Friends and relatives would each carry with him a sheng [a measure equivalent to 31.6 cubic inches] of rice and a jug of wine to partake in a feast provided by the host, who would slaughter cattle or buy pork and beef from the market for the occasion.

764 2) Funeral. The funeral rituals of the various Miao-I
[755] groups in Kweichow are more or less similar. Due to their belief in spirits, they resort to wizardry for the expulsion of evil spirits in case of sickness, but they would never take any medicine with the result that nine out of ten cases of serious sickness end in death. A man who dies of old age is given funeral rites at

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768 inherited estate, upon which other children may likewise live, according to the particular arrangements agreed upon.

Among the settled "Méo" tribes (near irrigated rice fields or
423 particularly fertile areas) the idea of property is clearly established. The ground belongs to the one who has cleared it or laid it out, and it is transmitted by inheritance.

Everywhere else customs are found analogous to those of the "Man," the ground belonging temporarily to the one who cultivates it, but it is abandoned when it is exhausted or when a better piece of ground is found near which one goes and settles.

The "Méo" woman gives birth sitting on a tabouret, supported
844 by her mother and by other old women. She afterward lies down on a cot bed. The placenta is buried in front of the door, if a boy is
553 born; it is buried [165] under the hearth if it is a girl (1). Thirty-
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[775]

1. The "Méo" must know where his placenta is so that he may retrieve it when he is reincarnated.

three days after his birth the child receives his name. Relatives and friends bring presents to him and this is the occasion for a feast
[527] as sumptuous as the resources of the family permit. Gifts and feasts are renewed upon all the birthdays. In principle, the children are
853 nursed for three years.

Abortion is practiced among the "Méo" for all irregular
847 pregnancies (unmarried women and widows). In case of failure, the baby simply is abandoned from the moment of his birth and dies of hunger.

Among certain "Méo" tribes of China the "couvade" still is
846 practiced (the husband goes to bed during the accouchement and receives treatment). This custom is not practiced by the "Méo" of Tonkin, but one observes among them customs that appear to be derived from it. The husband must follow a vegetable diet, he is forbidden to be away from home and to cross over the passes leading toward the neighboring valleys.

582 The "Méo" may contract marriage, either within their own clan, or within any other tribe of the group. They marry very seldom outside their group.

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769 782 [852] [764] As has already been described in detail in the pertinent sections of the chapter, "Life in the Community," sacrifices are offered to the ancestors on the third day after the birth of a child, in connection with the conclusion of a marriage, and at the burial of a human being. When it is a matter of the death of the head of a family, his chief wife, together with the oldest son of the deceased, offers a sacrifice.

The Meau is not satisfied, however, with the sacrifices mentioned, for the ancestors play an important role in all the details of his everyday life. For example, the spirits are informed of any change in the number of the livestock of the household, since whenever anyone sacrifices an animal, he does not fail to let some blood drip upon sacral paper and in burning this, calls upon the ancestors to enjoy themselves as well. If [437] an animal is sold alive, one sacrifices an appropriate amount of spirit-money to the ancestors, informs them of the sale, and thanks them for their help in letting the animal become large and strong. Even if one only sells a little pig, he remembers the ancestors and thanks them for letting the sow become so great with young and bring so many young into the world.

484 782 [461] Sacrifices are made not only before decisive events, but also before beginning any kind of work or prior to a journey. I was able to take part in one such sacrifice. The brother-in-law of Chief Tsin Tsai had come for a visit and now intended to return to his village. The chief decided to sacrifice a pig in order to make sure that his relative would have a safe trip. The sacrifice was offered to the high Father-Mother spirit, and accordingly the bench that otherwise stood in front of the altar within the house was set up in front of the house. The fettered live pig was put on it in such a way /209/ that its snout projected beyond it. On the ground under it spirit-money in the value of the pig was burned, and through this it was "bought" from the spirits (Ill. 103).[1] The bench was then cleared, and on it the chief placed bowls of tea and incense candles and added six pieces of spirit-money, each having the spirit-value of 25 pieces of silver. Next he picked up the oracle horns and asked the [787] spirits whether his brother-in-law would have a safe journey home.

[1] [see cat 116, P704- ANALYST]